

NRCS NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Natural Resources Conservation Service
375 Jackson Street • Suite 600 St. Paul, MN 55101-1854 • (651) 602-7900
Web: <http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

[Julie MacSwain](#), State Public Affairs Specialist, (651) 602-7859

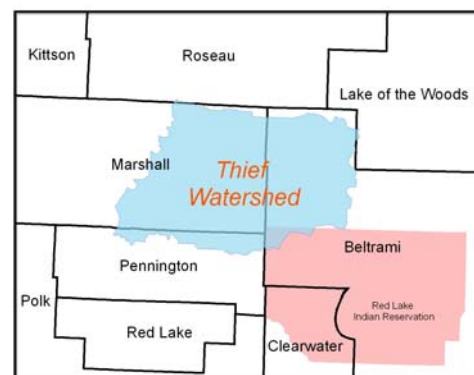
Schafer ANNOUNCES CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM SIGN-UP

Sign-Up Begins April 18 in 51 Watersheds Nationwide

WASHINGTON,— March 28, 2008—Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer announced a sign-up for the Conservation Security Program (CSP) that will be available starting on April 18 to approximately 64,000 potentially eligible farms and ranches in 51 watersheds covering more than 23.7 million acres.

"As President Bush has said, those who depend on the land to make a living are the best stewards of the land," said Schafer. "Since the first sign-up in 2004, CSP has offered payments for enhancing natural resources, rewarding those farmers and ranchers who are model conservationists, and providing incentives for other producers to achieve those same high standards of conservation in agriculture."

The CSP sign-up is open in the 51 watersheds from April 18, 2008 to May 16, 2008. The sign-up announcement and specific program requirements are being published in the Federal Register. In Minnesota, the Thief River Watershed is the only eligible watershed. This watershed includes nearly 300,000 acres in eastern Marshall, northeastern Pennington, and northern Beltrami counties plus very limited acreage in southern Roseau and southwestern Lake of the Woods counties.



CSP is a voluntary conservation program that supports ongoing stewardship of private, agricultural working lands and rewards those producers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations.

Payments can include three components: 1) an annual stewardship component for the base level of conservation treatment, 2) an annual component for maintenance of existing conservation practices, and 3) an enhancement component for exceptional conservation effort. Enhancement activities could include limited pesticide applications, renewable energy generation, and widening existing riparian forest buffers for restoring critical stream habitat.

To apply for CSP, NRCS asks potential participants to complete a CSP self-assessment workbook—which will be handed out at future informational meetings or are available at

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www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp—to find out if their operation meets the requirements of the program and qualifies for program participation. The self-assessment process is completed using a self-screening questionnaire for each land use to be enrolled. When this process is completed, the producer submits the CSP workbook to the local NRCS office during the sign-up period and meets with NRCS personnel to go over any additional needed documentation. NRCS will then determine if eligibility requirements are met and provide options for the producer's decision on enrollment category placement.

NRCS held the first CSP sign-up in 2004. This announcement brings the number of watersheds enrolled to 331 across the nation, covering 247.7 million acres that have been eligible for the program. CSP is offered on a rotational basis in as many watersheds as funding allows. Additional information on CSP, including eligible watersheds and the CSP Self-Assessment Workbook is available at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp>.

Future informational meeting dates and locations will be publicized in your local paper and broadcast on local radio stations at a later date. In addition, all landowners and operators of record in the watershed will be contacted by mail concerning this sign-up.

NRCS contact information:

Marshall County: Gwen Kappes (Watershed Coordinator), 218-745-4351, Ext. #3

Pennington County: Kathy Fillmore, 218-681-1612, Ext. #3

Beltrami County: Larry Voltz, 218-751-1942, Ext. #3

Roseau County: John Anderson, 218-463-1862, Ext. #3

Lake of the Woods County: Kelly Voigt, 218-634-2757, Ext. #3